

RIPLEY, S.D. & BOND, G.M. 1971. Systematic notes on a collection of birds from Kenya. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology* 111: 1-21.

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### LESLIE HILTON BROWN - AN APPRECIATION

Irascible, uncompromising and totally individual, he gave, and left, far more than he demanded from life; correction - he demanded a lot, and usually got it, but never for himself; thus his contribution to the world was monumental.

Agriculture and ecology, the environment in which we live, and his great love, the world of birds, all benefited vastly from his dedicated work. There can be few men who have contributed so much, and to those of us who were lucky enough to be counted as his friends, he gave even more - an insight into the world of a dying race. As a colonial administrator in his chosen field he can have had few equals, yet his total intolerance of any form of inefficiency or idleness (human failings of which he was violently critical) was always tempered with a determination to earn his keep, and he could always come up with a practical, viable answer, which he was able and willing to demonstrate himself.

The subject of soil erosion (currently popular again) with all its cumulative disasters, had been controlled almost completely by his own personal efforts as long ago as 1960. Many are the old Mberere people in the lower Embu District who remember "Brown". They never knew when he would turn up personally, on foot, to inspect their *shambas*, and consequently few were eroded! One of his many stories - round a camp fire on Eagle Hill - with a glass of whisky in hand, told of an old man who harvested *miraa* for a living. In the colonial days this was highly illegal - and the old man was horrified and shattered at the appearance of "Brown" in his boma, on the top of a mountain in the Mberere area, just as he had cut a large quantity for illicit sale. We were never told what happened to the old man in the matter of the illegal *miraa*, except that his eroded *shamba* was beautifully terraced within a week!

Another incident I witnessed myself took place during one of the frequent visits to Eagle Hill between 1977 and 1979. We watched with horror and disgust the progression of a large gully as it eroded its way further and further, with each rainstorm, up the mountainside, taking huge trees and tons of viable soil with it - each visit showing more and more just how unthinking neglect could rapidly destroy the land. It started just above a school full of eager young children and dedicated teachers (we stopped once or twice and spoke to them in class). We left the school one day in time to record another hundred yards or so of gully, now ten feet deep, with a fallen 20 year-old acacia tree in its maw, just as the school children started singing a hymn. Brown stopped in his stride, listened a moment, and growled "A little more real education and a lot less of God and Shakespeare could stop this rot in five minutes".

There was humour too, closely related to his links with nature and human environment. Breakfasting one morning at the Isaac Walton Inn at Embu, raucous 'pop' music, loud and pounding, boomed from the speakers in the dining room. With a cold aggressive look at the source he commented in a low growl "By God,

Elvis Presley has a lot to answer for!"

I can think of no finer epitaph to a great man, a great Kenyan, than the complete reversal of the past 15 years of soil erosion and environmental destruction.

If his ghost could look down on his beloved Eagle Hill on to terraced, flourishing farmland, with all the scars of mismanagement healed and covered, it would rest in peace - and his lifelong devoted efforts would not have been in vain.

Peter Davey

## NOTICES

### The African Seabird Group

This was originally formed in 1976 as the Southern African Seabird Group, to increase communication and co-operative work among those in the region interested in seabirds. Seven volumes of its bulletin, *The Cormorant*, appeared up to 1979. The group has now expanded its sphere of interest to the whole Ethiopian Region, and become the African Seabird Group. At the same time, from 1980, *The Cormorant* has become a fully-fledged journal, to be issued in two parts each year. The Group is keen to increase its membership of seabird enthusiasts based outside the southern part of Africa.

*The Cormorant* Volume 8, No. 1, June 1980 (40 pp.) contains six short papers, notes, news, a review of recent seabird literature for the Ethiopian Region and details of new membership. The issue contains items of interest on many topics, including feeding and breeding behaviour, distribution and identification. Papers include an account of the predation techniques of the Subantarctic Skua, notes on Caspian Tern breeding, details of Wedge-tailed Shearwater records in southern African waters and the results of seabird censuses at Seal Rock.

Subscriptions to the African Seabird Group for 1980 are R.2.50. From 1981, the annual subscription will be R.5.00. Back numbers of *The Cormorant* are available. Full details from the Secretary, Southern African Seabird Group, c/o South African Bird Ringing Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

### *Ecological survey of the Nguruman Forest, Kenya* by V.C. & C. Fayad

Results of a one year detailed survey of the vegetation and avifauna of the Nguruman Forest, south-central Kenya. 33 pages of text plus 120 pages of maps, graphs and tables. Xeroxed copies.

Costs, inclusive of surface mail delivery: Sterling £10.00, US \$24.00 or Kenya Shs. 170.00. Cheques/bank drafts payable direct to V.C. Fayad, Naro Moru River Lodge, Box 18, Naro Moru, Kenya.

### The East African Bird Report 1980

The report, which will form the fifth issue of this volume of *Scopus*, will be published in 1981. Readers are asked to please send in their records of birds as follows: Non-Palaeartic species to D.A. Turner, Box 48019, Nairobi and Palaeartic species to B.S. Meadows, Box 30521, Nairobi.

Individuals undertaking ornithological studies in East Africa are requested to send brief details to D.A. Turner, so that the coverage in the Report will be as complete as possible.